DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 820 CS 505 277

AUTHOR Wolff, Leanne O.
TITLE Interpersonal Communication in the Undergraduate Core.
PUB DATE Apr 86
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Cincinnati, OH, April 17-19, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Development; College Seniors; Communication Skills; Core Curriculum; Course Content; Course Descriptions; Curriculum Development; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; *Interpersonal Relationship; Maturity (Individuals); Research Skills; *Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS College Juniors

ABSTRACT

The interpersonal communication course at an Ohio college is based on several assumptions about the nature of interpersonal communication. First, the course should emphasize both the ability to demonstrate knowledge of the communicative behavior appropriate in a given situation (cognitive domain) and the performance necessary for communication (skill domain). Second, interpersonal communication is complex and situational. Each member of a given interaction brings a heavy load of baggage, including old and new attitudes, values, and past experiences. Since the situation, organization, and culture also add to the complexity of interpersonal interchange, an interpersonal course should assist students in understanding that complexity. Third, research on cognitive development suggests that understanding the situational nature of interpersonal communication and determining the best communication strategy are probably beyond the maturation level of most freshmen and sophomores. As a result, the interpersonal course is best offered as an upper level course that provides an excellent vehicle for introducing social science methodology to upperclass students who are capable of critically evaluating the literature and conducting field studies. Although teaching a central element such as interpersonal communication to upperclass students may be questioned by many, it is too important to be diluted for the entering student. (A course syllabus is included.) (HOD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED269820

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CORE

Leanne O. Wolff, Ph. D.
Heidelberg College

Presented at the annual convention of the Central States Speech Association, Cincinnati, OH April 17-19, 1986

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Leanne O. Wolff

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 505 277

The Small College Conference on the Essential Curriculum held in the summer of 1985 at Hope College stimulated much thought concerning what should be taught in the communication curriculum. The conference participants defined several broad areas as "essential" but left for future consideration the nature of the "core" courses.

The Hope conferees agreed quite readily on the centrality of interpersonal communication in the core. It is quite unlikely, however, that the nature and content of the course will be as easily agreed upon, for there are many methods of teaching interpersonal communication. The number and nature of available textbooks attests to the wide variety; all have merit.

The attached syllabus details my approach to teaching interpersonal communication. More accurately, the syllabus represents the present epoch in the ongoing evolution of the course I teach; the course changes as new needs and opportunities are presented by my students, myself, and the discipline.

While the course varies from year to year, several of my assumptions about interpersonal communication and the young adult student undergird the course I teach. Four of the most basic of these assumptions, which have remained constant for quite some time, are articulated below.

The Essential Assumptions

#1. The course is a competency course, as competence was defined by Larson, Backlund, Redmond and Barbour[1] and argued by McCroskey. [2]

After considering many of the issues concerning competency, Larson et. al. conclude that competence is the "ability to demonstrate knowledge of the communicative behavior socially appropriate in a given situation."[3] They assert that "ability" indicates skill or performance necessary for communication while "knowledge" indicates an understanding of the rule patterns that are a cognitive part of the communicatively competent person. McCroskey furthers the argument by asserting that "the performance of behaviors judged to be competent is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for a judgment of communication competence." He emphasizes the necessity of an understanding of appropriate behavior whether or not that behavior is performed. Thus, both argue that compentency is more than the demonstration of selected behaviors or skills.

Using the taxonomy well known in educational circles, McCroskey points out that the cognitive domain of learning encompasses the content of a field while the psychomotor area is the domain of communication skill. Finally, affective communicative learning is concerned with attitudes and feelings of the learner about the other two domains. It is possible for learning related to communication to occur in one domain without corresponding learning in another. McCroskey concludes that "all of the domains of learning bear directly on whether learners will engage in future behavior that we

deem appropirate...Confusing competence with performance and/or ignoring affect will lead to both inaccurate diagnoses and ineffective instruction." [4] Backlund concurs with McCroskey and emphasizes the importance of both effectiviness (skill) and competence in communication.[5]

In the ideal curriculum, the interpersonal course will deal with all domains. In particular, the skill domain while essential must not be emphasized at the expense of the cognitive. When I read many of the contemporary interpersonal texts and articles such as Glasser's on behavioral competency [6] I fear that skills development is frequently assigned the major role in interpersonal pedagogy. In the course described in the syllabus, skill development (communicator effectiveness) while emphasized in several classroom activities is not the sole nor primary focus.

#2. Interpersonal communication is complex and situational. Each member of a given interaction brings a heavy load of baggage including old and new attitudes, values, past experiences. Relationships and power differences between or among the members are always a factor. The situation, organization and culture also add to the complexity of a seemingly simple interpersonal interchange. The communicator must consider the entire "mix" before deciding what is "appropriate" in a given interaction. It is not always appropriate to be assertive, to self-disclose, to listen empathically, to solve problems by consensus. As Beverly Bryum-McGaw reminded us, "It Depends!"

Much of our interpersonal literature and teaching is based on

the assumption that acceptance of self, self-disclosure, establishment of trust and movement toward intimacy are goals to be most highly prized. Jensen and Trenholm argue that only a small part of our interpersonal communication actually lies along the intimacy trajectory and that we need to consider the social conditions under which different models of communication have meaning.[7] This suggests that interpersonal communication is even more complex, that competency may be even more elusive than general acknowledged. Our teaching needs to assist our students in understanding that complexity.

The course I have outlined attempts to both introduce the complexity of the behavior and to develop the attitude that appropriate behaviors will vary from one situation to another.

#3. Our students are in an active state of maturation. William Perry's work on the cognitive and ethical development of the college age student [8] postulates a nine position schema through which young adults will grow. In the first stages, which Perry terms the "basic duality", young adults tend to see the world in terms of "right and wrong". The right answers exist and are known to authorities and are waiting to be learned. Entering college students generally think in duality terms but gradually move to a position of "multipicity" where a diversity of opinion and values is recognized in areas where the right answers are not yet known; therefore, no judgments can be made among them and "everyone has the right to his own opinions." Finally, the mature young adult arrives at a cognitive state Perry terms "relativism" in which a diversity of opinion, values and

judgments derived from a variety of sources, evidence, logic,and systems allow for analyis and comparison.

Perry's work suggests that interpersonal courses based primarily on performance or effectiveness may indeed be appropriate for the lower level student who is just beginning the maturation process. But the development of cognitive as well as psychomotor competency may be difficult and probably impossible for the first or second year student. Understanding the situational nature of interpersonal communication and difficulty of determining the "best" communication strategy is probably beyond the maturation level of the underclass student.

Halley [9] described his frustration in trying to teach interpersonal communication to beginning level students, concluding that they were not developmentally ready for understanding a relationship model that he was using. Although he did not mention Perry, his assessment clearly supports Perry's theory. I agree with his diagnosis (although not necessarily with his solution of converting the interpersonal class into a values clarification program) that his students were simply not ready.

Textbooks in "advanced" interpersonal topics lend support to the belief that students have not assimilated the material in lower level interpersonal courses. Some of them[10] repeat much of the material one would expect to find in an introductory course.

These three assumptions have led me to the conclusion that the interpersonal course is best designed as an upper level course. Given the great complexity of the process, we will do our students a

great disservice if we merely teach them a few skills which may or may not be appropriate in an given communication interaction. Yet in developmental terms, that is probably all our entering students can honestly accept. I firmly believe that for the communication major, an understanding of and skill in interpersonal communication is so important that we cannot afford to take the risk of presenting the material to students who are not developmentally ready to understand.

Ideally, one would have an introductory course in which some skills and some theory might be taught, followed by an upper level course. But in our small programs, few of us have that luxury and so I believe that the interpersonal course is best offered latter in the program than is now common.

Placing the course in the upper level permits me to base the syllabus on yet another assumption.

#4. The interpersonal course provides an excellent vehicle for introducing the student to social science methodology. Many students will have had a course in statistics. Evaluating the design of the literature and conducting simple field studies are well within the capablities of the upperclass student and these activities assist in the critical evaluation of the material presented in the course. If a department does not have a research course, this course allows a minimal introduction to research concepts. If a research course is in place, then this serves as an excellent introduction/reinforcement to that course.

Conclusion

These are the assumptions on which I base the upper level interpersonal course. There is very little strikingly unusual about the content of the course. Teaching a central element, especially interpersonal communication, to upperclass students may be questioned by many. But for the reasons outlined above, I believe that if we have only one opportunity to reach the student, then interpersonal is simply too important a study to be diluted for the entering student.

As a personal final note, I find it stimulating to work with the more mature student who thinks, questions and enjoys the challenge of the original materials. The course becomes a learning experience for all of us to a degree which lower level courses rarely achieve.

Endnotes

1. Carl E. Larson, Philip M. Backlund, Mark K. Redmond and Alton Barbour, Assessing Functional Communication (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association and ERIC, 1987), p. 24

2. James C. McCroskey, "Communication Competence and Performance: A Research and Pedagogical Perspective", Communication Education, 31 (1982), 1-7

3. Larson, P. 21

4. McCroskey, p. 6

5. Phil Backlund, "A Response to Communication Competence and Performance", Communication Education, 31 (1982), 365-366

6. Susan R. Glaser, "Interpersonal Communication Instruction: A Behavioral Competency Approach", Communication Education, 32 (1983), 221-227.

7. Arthur Jensen and Sarah Trenholm, "Intimacy and Social Loss: The Need for an Expanded Definition of Interpersonal Relationships", SCA, November, 1985

8. William G. Perry, Jr., Intellectual & Ethical Development, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston), 1968.

9. Richard Halley, "Toward A Position on What, How and Why to Teach in Interpersonal Communications or A Theory of Maturation and Skill Development", SCA, November, 1980

10. See Steven Beebe & John Masterson, Family Talk, (New York: Random House), 1986 and Judy Pearson, Genergder and Communication, (William C. Brown), 1985

CTA 354
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Dr. Wolff
Founders Hall

Texts:

Interplay 3rd. ed. Adler, Rosenfeld & Towne
Family Communication 2nd ed. Galvin & Brommel
Bridges Not Walls 3rd ed. Stewart

Interpersonal communication has been described as one of man's most basic activities, an activity which consumes about 70% of our time, insures our survival and influences the quality of our life. This course is an introduction to that process, an examination of an activity in which all of us have much experience. Unhappily, a large portion of that experience has for many been less than pleasant and productive. A basic assumption of the course is that as we understand the process and the feelings created by interpersonal communication, we can better control our interactions with our environment and with others.

Volumes have been written about the process; I am surrounded as I write this! We cannot examine all that's written but we will consider a representative sample, covering major variables which influence the process.

The course is geared at an intermediate level, with an attempt to balance theoretical and experiential learning (that means there will be exercises and readings!)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

While course objectives are often merely items in an instructor's wild imagination, they can be useful to you in helping understand why you're being asked to read materials, engage in activities and complete projects. The following are my objectives as I plan the course and present materials in the classroom. It is my hope that you will adopt these as your broad goals for the semester and take them with you as goals for your lifetime of interpersonal interactions.

1. TO UNDERSTAND the process of interpersonal communication, the significant variables and their possible effects on the process. This will include a knowledge of some, but not all, of the relevant concepts and chief theories which are associated with the study of interpersonal communication as we understand it today.

2. TO BE AWARE of the effects of interpersonal communiation on both yourself and those with whom you interact. You should begin to think in terms of "How do I react in this type interaction? How does my communication affect those with whom I am interacting?" This includes the feelings, such as trust, suspicion, openness, which are aroused by

interpersonal communication.

3. **TO EXPERIENCE** communication behaviors and interpersonal encounters similar to the ones we're discussing. Classroom activities and other assignments will provide an opportunity for you to try out new behavior in a helpful, accepting environment.

4. **TO CHANGE** your interpersonal communication behavior so that you can engage in continually more satisfying and fulfilling interactions throughout your life.

5. **TO OBSERVE** and interpret interpersonal communication behaviors in relation to the theories we encounter in the course. You will be asked to complete simple research assignments in order to understand how scholars come to their understandings of the process. While you are not expected to have taken a course in research design, it will be helpful if you brush up on statistical probability.

(I aknowledge assistance in wording these from Jon A Blubaugh and Jim Quiggins who wrote the instructor's manual to accompany Patton and Giffin's Interpersonal Communication in Action)

STRUCTURE OF COURSE

Classroom I expect to conduct a student-centered classroom. We will engage in many types of communication events and all of us should share the responsibility of learning. The syllabus is a bare outline; fill it in to meet your needs and interests. I hope you will be reading and observing far more than is outlined here.

Reading Readings for this class will be from the texts and from materials which I have placed on reserve. I have selected materials one the following criteria: (1) the reading is considered almost "classic" (not quite the humanities sense of the word!) or seminal (it generated much discussion and research), (2) the reading clarifies a concept, (3) the reading will hopefully stimulate your thinking on the topic.

You should read assigned material before class. In class, there will be opportunity to discuss materials and participate in related activities. In both class sessions and examinations, you will be expected to analyze and synthesize, to compare and contrast the ideas we explore. In other words, the materials in the various units are not unrelated!

Most of you know me well enough to know that if you are unprepared to discuss readings, I am very likely to launch into a lecture. If you object to my lecturing, then come prepared!

Communication Journal You are, beginning immediately, to keep a journal in which you record significant observations on your interpersonal communication. This is not to be a record of everything you say. Its purpose is to note and interpret communication experiences which illustrate or relate the principles being studied in class. Hopefully, you will become more aware of your own communication patterns and problems (this has been termed the "ah-

hah" syndrome).

Specific assignments may be made to provide a common focus for your journals. Often you may select any of your own experiences. Each entry should be dated and include a brief description of the experience and your interpretation of the communication involved. You should not reveal the other's identity (and everything will be kept confidential).

Journals will be returned. Each entry should be 2-3 typewritten pages or the equivalent.

The journals will be collected on Wednesdays and evaluated on one criterion: How well did you relate what you were learning in class to your out-of-class life?

Writing Requirement This course has been designated as one meeting the writing requirement of the college. Your final grade will, therefore, include evaluation of your writing as well as your mastery of course content. Style and technical skills, as well as content, will be critiqued.

Attendance Obviously, if we are to share, we will need someone to share with! I will expect that you will be in attendance most of the time. I will set no definite number of cuts, but if I feel you are missing so frequently that you are not contributing your share or that your work is suffering, I will call you to a conference to discuss the matter. Should that happen I reserve the right to demand your attendance from that point. If you continue to cut, your grade will then be lowered.

Grading Unfortunately, evaluation is always part of the process.

1. There will be 3 midterms. These and the final exam will account for 60% of your grade.
   You can expect that each exam will have both multiple choice questions and essays. I frequently choose to give you a list of possible essays prior to the exam and select the questions to be answered from that list.
2. Projects account for 30%.
3. The remaining 10% will be based on my evaluation of your work. That means I will be noting your class participation, your preparation for assignments, etc.

COURSE OF STUDY

I. Introduction (Two class periods)
   Interplay Chpt. 1
   Family Communication Galvin et. al, Chpt. 1

II. Unit I Self Perception (Eight Class Periods)
   Interplay Adler, Rosenfeld & Towne Chpt. 2,3
   "Life Cycles", Eric Ericson Int. Ency. of Social Sciences
   Passages, Sheehy, pp. 29-196
   Gender and Communication Pearson p. 35-65

Elections and the Mass Media Blomquist "Empirical Research", Chapter 2
Bridges Not Walls 3rd Edition
"The Fully Functioning Self" Kelly
"Issues in Person Perception" Hastorf et al.
People Making Satir Chpt. 3

First Project Due
Hypothesis Generating and Testing. See Attached Instructions

Exam

III. Interpersonal Dimensions (Ten Class Periods)
(Self-Disclosure, Trust, Climate, Listening, Feedback, Expression of Feelings, Power)
Interplay Chpt. 6, 8, 9, 10
Family Communication Chpt. 6
Bridges Not Walls "Empathic Listening" Kelly
"Listening as Empathic Support" Eagen
"Assertive, No-Assertive and Agressive Behavior" Alberti
"Owning Anger" Augsburger
"Self-Disclosure" Jourard
"Interpersonal Encounter" Powell
People Making Chpt. 5, 6, 7

Second Project Due
Integrative Paper on Interpersonal Dimension or Book Report See Attached

Exam

IV. Verbal Code (Four Class Periods)
Interplay Chpt. 4
The Art of Awareness 3rd Ed. Bois Chpt. 6
Gender and Communicatio Chpt. 3, 6
Speech Monographs 51, December "Powerful & Powerless Speech Styles" Bradac et al.
Human Communication Research 10, Winter "Friendly or Unfriendly Persuasion", Burgoon et al.

V. Non-Verbal Code (Three Class Periods)
Interplay Chpt 5
Communication Monographs 49, June "Violations of Conversational Distance" Burgoon et al.
Communication Monographs 52, March "Meanings of Touch", Jones et al.

Exam

VI. Relational Communication (Seven Class Periods)
Interplay Chpt 9
Family Communication Chpt. 4, 5

Paper "Intimacy and Social Loss", Jensen et. al.
Communication Monographs 51, September "Topoi in Relational Communication", Burgoon et al.
Communication Monographs 52, September "Relational Control Patterns in Marital Types" Williamson et. al.
Communication Monographs 50, March "Openness as Problematic in Ongoing Friendships", Rawlings

Final Project Due
Naturalistic Research Project See Attached

Unit VII. Conflict (Four Class Periods)
Interplay Chpt 11
Family Communiation Chpt 9
Interpersonal Conflict Chpt 6
Working Through Conflict Folger/Poole Chpt 4
"Conflicts: Productive and Destructive", Deutsch, in Conflict Resolution through Communication, Jandt, ed.,

PROJECT GUIDELINES

Integrative Paper

This short paper will report your reading on a specific interpersonal variable such as dogmatism. You will be expected to read a variety of recent books and/or articles (don't neglect Psychological Abstracts). The paper should be a synthesis of your reading, not an abstract of one source followed by the next abstract. Your paper, in term-paper format, must follow MLA or APA stylesheets and be typed. Endnotes are acceptable.

Naturalistic Research Project

This is an observational study of interpersonal communication. For example, you might monitor conversations to compare sex-differences in the use of tag questions. Or you might trace the development of a rumor on campus or investigate students' attention to signs or table tents. This paper is to be written in the format described in the Blomquist article. Typed copy only.

Research topics and design must be discussed with the instructor before you begin the data collection.

Book Review

The paper will consist of a synopsis of the book (not to exceed 300 words) followed by your evaluation of the book for its contribution to understanding interpersonal communication. You will include the author's credentials, the book's data base (ex., 16 case studies or the author's personal experience), the author's assumptions and perspectives (the author may have a humanistic set of assumptions). If you choose to read two related books, you may abstract each and then compare/contrast them.

The Hypothesis Test Paper

1. All good papers (like speeches) start with an introduction. You may wish to write your initial paragraph after you have completed all or part of the paper.

2. What is the research question here? In general, what are you trying to learn more about? (For our assignment, this will involve in some way our understanding of self-concept?) Ex., I might want to study why self-esteem increases with age.

3. What are the possible answers to the question? To answer the question above, we could consider the effects of satisfaction with body, increase in understanding of the person's place in social group, the completion of life goals, satisfaction with health etc. In this portion of the paper, the writer refers to why each of these might be a reasonable/unreasonable answer, making explicit references to writings supporting each view.

4. Next, one must explain which is the best answer and how one will attempt to demonstrate that. Here you need a **concise, clear** statement of your hypothesis. This needs to be followed by a description of the data to be used--how and by whom it was collected, what relevant questions were asked; how you will define variables for analysis. **NOTE:** Since your dependent variable will be some measure of self-concept, you will need to operationally define self-concept in terms of one of the variables available to you. That is, you will need to choose one variable, which for this argument you are calling self-concept, and explain why you have selected this one. Ex., a possible hypothesis: Poor health reduces one's self-concept, as measured by trust of others.

5. Run a contingency Table test, following instructions:

Login CTA354
Password INTER
Subfiles 77 or 78
Independent Variable
Dependent Variable

6. Read and interpret tables. We will use a Chi Square of .01 or less as our confidence level.

7. Cut and paste tables to include in report. Write an explanation of how the evidence does or does not support your conclusions.

8. Answer the question "So what?" What difference does it make that your explanation holds? Or does not hold? Were there any built in sources of error which might have influenced the results? What implications do the results have for future research? For the study of interpersonal communication?